



How do people View Feminism in Myanmar?

August 29, 2019

The word "Feminism (Féminisme)" introduced by "Charles Fourier", French philosopher in 1837, has spread throughout the world via several Feminist movements. Myanmar is no exception, as the country has also experienced feminist movements. The "Feminism in Myanmar" book launching event was held at the Institut français de Birmanie in Yangon on August 23. The research for this book was conducted by EMReF in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES).

The launching event was followed by a panel discussion which was about contemporary feminism, involving panelists from several different fields. A summary of the panel discussion about Feminism is below.





Dr. Aye Nwe
 Associate Professor
 Myanmar Institute of Theology

I am teaching to understand the views of Feminism in Christian society

I am a professor from Myanmar Institute of Theology, and teach about Feminism and Theology, specifically the study of the Christian religion from a Feminist perspective. Women's leadership is very weak in our Christian society. For example, most women graduates from our University have to work back at the church. There is no equality between men and women when they are working. When the men return to the church, they become Pastor, but women work in the women's department or Christian education. Therefore, we found that the status of men and women is very different. Also, leaders in the Christian community are mostly men; there are just a small number of women in leadership roles. The reason I am aware of women's lives and struggles strongly supports me to teach Feminism theology. I am the one who is teaching about views of Feminism within Christian society, so I am already friendly to be called myself as Feminist.

Have to struggle a lot for Feminism in Myanmar

Feminist ideology is derived from Western countries, so there are a lot of problems when introducing Feminist concepts in Myanmar. There is no problem for someone who understands its meaning. For people who do not know about Feminism, they reject it because it is assumed to be Western ideology. Women's movements were not started only when the word "Feminism" came to Myanmar. Before the word "Feminism" was introduced, Myanmar women have been struggling a lot for their values and dignity throughout the history. We noticed that many women's movements for women's rights and freedom were already started before the ideological construct of 'feminism' was introduced. However, when the term was introduced, women's movements became more well-known in the world. Each individual's understanding of feminism is different; so it is important to learn and understand different interpretations of feminist concepts.



Salai Aung Ling
 Program Director
 Gender and Development
 Institute

When we talk about Feminism, we have both "able-to change" and "unable to change" institutions

My answer about 'whether I am a feminist or not' depends on the person who is asking me about my views. It is Yes, and also No. If people attempt to change the religious texts, perhaps our Christian society may have an extreme view. For example, in the Bible, God is referred to by the masculine pronoun, "He". So, there might be an approach to change Bible text to "She" instead of "He". If that kind of approach is called Feminism, I am not a Feminist. But if the approach is to fight against women being sexually harassed in the society, and if that kind of approach called Feminism, I could say I am a Feminist. When we are trying to change institutions, firstly we are not thinking about institutions which are easy to change, but we are trying to influence institutions

which are difficult to change. If that kind of approach is called Feminism, then I am afraid.

Are practice and opinion Consistent?

Another thing to consider is practice and opinion. I always ask myself: do I support gender equality? However, I am really asking myself if I am actually applying gender equality in my daily life. The main question: "Is there consistency between understanding the concept and applying the practice."

What are Men's Views of Feminism?

We have studied about men's views of Feminism and about 30% of (women's) participation in various sectors. The objective of the research is to think about ways to change men's perspectives by examining their understanding regarding gender and feminism. We have found that men are proud of being male. They already understand about inequality between men and women. However, men feel that the aim of gender equality is just to criminalize them. They said that even when a man accidentally touch a woman's legs, he might be suspected as a person who is going to do something harmful to women. Secondly, men are invited to many gender or sexual violence training activities where participants discuss discrimination against women. As a result, men think that these activities are meant only to blame men. They suggested that the people who are 'doing gender equality and feminism' should also discuss men's experiences and suffering. The activists should point out that men can also be victims in Myanmar society, not only women.



Chuu Wai Nyein
Artist, illustrator

Draw the pictures of women on women's longyi/htamein (Sarong)

By the time I started painting, I found that male artists were drawing more women's portraits; I did not want to follow in their footsteps. As a woman, I want to illustrate women's issues when I draw female portraits. The female portraits with 'thanatkhar (Burmese Traditional Cosmetic) and htamein (Sarong)' are in high demand. But I do not want to do that. So, I portray the strength of women, and draw portraits of strong women. I usually create my arts on women's longyis (Sarong). After washing clothes, men's clothes are hung above women's clothes to dry. By creating art on women's longyis, I believe that the value of women's longyis has risen. All the female portraits I created show women being confident and experiencing more freedom, because they are not like the women who are in men's imagination. My creations might be different, but also more transparent. The art can reveal the portraits of strong and confident women. My art gives something thoughtful to the viewers; sometimes I try to mock through painting - anyway, women in my illustration are strong.

I trust that Feminism is about building mutual respect and valuing each other

Most people think that Feminism is about women trying to be equal with men, and also believe that the people who are involved in this movement or support this idea are feminists. Sometimes, feminism is misinterpreted, as a kind of act, where women are imitating men. Male and female body structures are completely different; each has its own advantage. Actually, the purpose is not to forget our own values and change. I trust that Feminism is about building mutual respect and valuing each other.



Photo:Si Thu

All need to make efforts to achieve gender equality

August 30, 2019

“Not only the government, but also all people, need to make efforts towards achieving gender equality”, said Dr. Kathy Kyaw, Director of Yangon Region Department of Social Welfare.

She said “If we are contributing our efforts to equality between men and women, in terms of gender equality, that is also contributing to human development of the country. All cannot be done by government alone. The country would gain more benefits only when people follow the policy.”

The Women’s Organizations Network

of Myanmar (WON)’s 11th annual ceremony was held in Summit Parkview Hotel, Yangon on August 27. Dr. Mya Thida, wife of Minister Dr. Win Myat Aye, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement and also General Secretary of the Orphans Reduction and Protection Association (Myanmar) said that if women’s organizations are coordinating with each other, then the gains for women would be endless.

Dr. Mya Thida said “The status of women in Myanmar was low; and there was no equality. Our culture and traditions allowed for this to happen. We have many things to do for the women: from newborns and

the elderly. There were many women’s organizations in Myanmar. They are working as much as they can. If women’s organizations are coordinating with each other, the gains for women would be endless. Then the success of WON is the result of their collective effort.”

WON was established in 2008, including nine women’s organizations to exchange information and to collaborate after Cyclone Nargis. Currently, WON includes 37 women’s organizations and collaborates with other organizations to promote the equality of women in society.

Shwe Lay

Gender Equality Network successfully launched the Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (PSHEA) Policy



Photo: Si Thu

August 28, 2019

Gender Equality Network (GEN) launched the Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (PSHEA) Policy on August 21.

According to GEN's press release, this policy is to prevent and reduce sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse. GEN's staff members developed this policy together to be used by their own organization, and also their member organizations.

This policy includes a compliant mechanism and

responsive actions that should be followed when cases of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse occur. If an individual or organization violates women or men, the case will be investigated in accordance with the procedures stated in the policy. If necessary, GEN will provide support to punish the offenders in accordance with existing laws.

GEN advocated for the development of this policy in order to create a healthy and productive workplace. If other organizations would like to adopt this policy, they can request permission from GEN.

Shwe Lay



Photo:https://time.com

World Famous Quotes

“If you stand for equality, You are a feminist.”

..... Emma Watson (Actress)

More Women’s participation is called in security and peace building process

September 22, 2019

Promotion of more women’s participation in the security sector and peace building process, and stopping civil war and violence, was promoted during the Women’s Forum for peace ceremony which was conducted by Women’s League of Burma- WLB.

Women’s Forum for Peace (2019) was held by WLB on September 20-21, and participants discussed the theme, “Together for Peace: Security for All”. This ceremony advocated to stop civil war, to stop all violence including violence against women and to promote more women’s participation in peace building and justice sectors.

WLB released the objectives of the forum are as follows: to build a sustainable peace process; to expand women’s activities in the future, to identify the recommendations for women, peace, and security in the national level project by discussing peace and security issues of all women



from multi-levels; to speak out about stopping civil war and developing human security through International Peace Day.

The contents of Nepal's "Women, Peace and Security National Level Project" were shared, then discussed. Participants discussed what should be included as main content in

Myanmar’s “Women, Peace and Security National Level Project”.

WLB was founded in 1999, to promote women’s participation in Myanmar’s Democracy movement. It was established with ethnic women’s organizations based in Thailand, India, and Bangladesh; now they have 13 member organizations. **Shwe Lay**